

CHICAGO -- After bringing together federal, city and private sector officials with U.S. Rep. Melissa Bean (D-Ill.) today for an O'Hare Security Summit, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) proposed new legislation to enhance airport security nationwide and called on the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to speed up the deployment of new technology at passenger checkpoints.

Last week, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials arrested more than 30 O'Hare workers for using fraudulent airport security identification cards to access sensitive areas of the airport. Many of the workers are thought to be illegal aliens

Additionally, media reports last month detailed a TSA report that found 60 percent of bomb materials and explosives hidden in carry-on items by undercover TSA agents were missed by screeners at O'Hare. At Los Angeles International Airport, screeners missed 75 percent of bomb materials. At San Francisco International Airport, a private screening company missed 20 percent of bomb materials.

"Our safety and economy depends on a secure O'Hare," said Congressman Kirk, who served on the House Transportation Aviation Subcommittee after September 11th. "To protect our national security, we must ensure only American citizens and legal permanent residents have access to sensitive areas and we must improve screening at passenger checkpoints."

Kirk said he will introduce legislation this week to create new "Federal Security Zones" at all U.S. airports, including the tarmac, airplanes, baggage handling and baggage loading areas. Under the proposal, all employees working in a "Federal Security Zone" would have to have a social security number. Access badges for Federal Security Zones may only be issued by federal TSA agents rather than local airport authorities. Finally, the TSA would have to run an employee's social security number through the E-Verify system to confirm identity and legal status before granting a security badge.

"We need to establish a clear principle governing access to security areas: If you want to get close to an airplane in the United States, you must be a U.S. citizen or a legal permanent resident," said Kirk, who authored the amendment to the Aviation and Transportation Security Act requiring all TSA baggage screeners to be U.S. citizens.

At the Security Summit, Kirk and Bean examined possible reasons for the USA Today reported screening failures at O'Hare. The discussion focused primarily on the technology currently deployed at passenger checkpoints and the ability of TSA screeners to adequately screen for bomb parts.

“While the technology to detect small bomb parts exists, the TSA is slow to deploy it to airports,” Kirk said. “The American people deserve the best screening technology available and the Congress should provide adequate funding to make that happen immediately.”

Participants in today's Security Summit included O'Hare Deputy Federal Security Director Ken Fletcher; Deputy Commissioner for Security Joseph O'Connor Jr., Chicago Department of Aviation; and Gerald Berry, the President of Covenant Aviation Security, which provides private security at San Francisco.